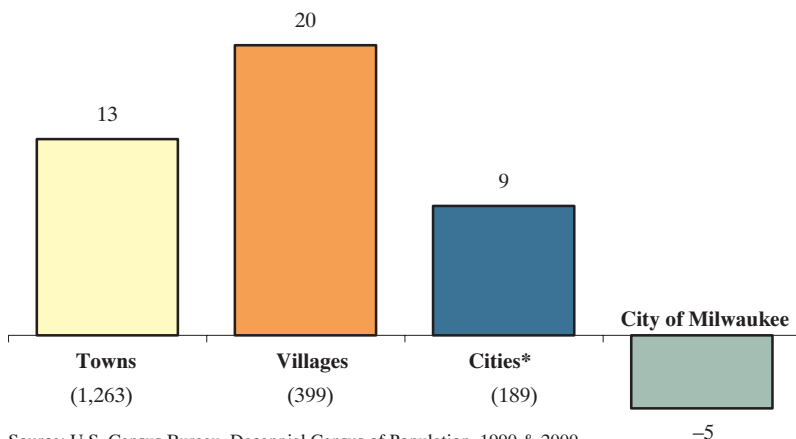


Figure 16

**Population Change for Wisconsin Towns, Villages & Cities:  
1990 to 2000**  
(Percent)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Census of Population, 1990 & 2000

\*City of Milwaukee excluded from this category.

Note: Counts of towns, villages, and cities are current as of 2000.

## Age and Sex Composition

The median age of a population is often used as a single measure to describe a population as “young” or “old.” This particular statistical measure indicates that half the people counted in a census were younger than the median age; the other half were older. Populations with a median age under 20 years are generally considered to have a “young” age structure. Medians of greater than 40 typify relatively “old” populations.

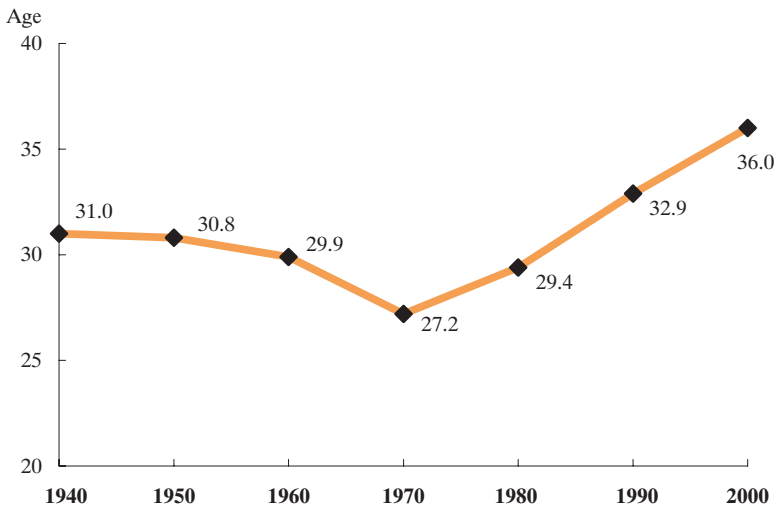
Wisconsin’s population had a median age of 32.9 years in 1990, identical to that for the country as a whole. Demographers understand that there is a natural, built-in tendency for populations, in the aggregate, to grow older. As each individual member of Wisconsin’s population adds a year of life with each passing year, one might expect the median age of the aggregate population to advance just as rapidly – an additional ten years with each passing decade. This is a process demographers refer to as “aging in place.” But there are forces which retard this aggregate aging process. Every birth reduces the aging of the population – i.e., retards the advance of the median age – since it adds a new member to the population at the age of zero, certainly well below the median! At the other end of the age spectrum, where the majority of deaths are among older persons, every death also retards the advance of the median age, since it removes from the population someone whose age is above the median. The relatively smaller number of deaths of persons who are not older than the median age will have the opposite effect, but these numbers, and their

influence on the trend of median age, are relatively insignificant. Migration flows, both to and away from the state, also affect the median age depending on the ages of the migrants. For Wisconsin these forces worked in concert to slow the advance of the median age. In 2000, rather than being 10 years higher than the 1990 median, the median age of the Wisconsin population was 36.0 years – only 3.1 years older than 1990. The comparable median for the U.S. as a whole was 35.3 years.

When the median age is tracked over time from 1940 (Fig. 17), it becomes apparent that the 2000 Census likely recorded the “oldest population” in the state’s history. There are several reasons for this, but the most significant cause is that the large baby boom generation (the 1.8 million babies born in Wisconsin between 1947 and 1964) has entered middle age, and in the past 20 years has moved from ages mostly below the median age to ages mostly above the median. This process of aging has been reinforced by continued low birth rates and by increasing life expectancy for older persons.

Figure 17

**Median Age of Population, Wisconsin: 1940 to 2000**



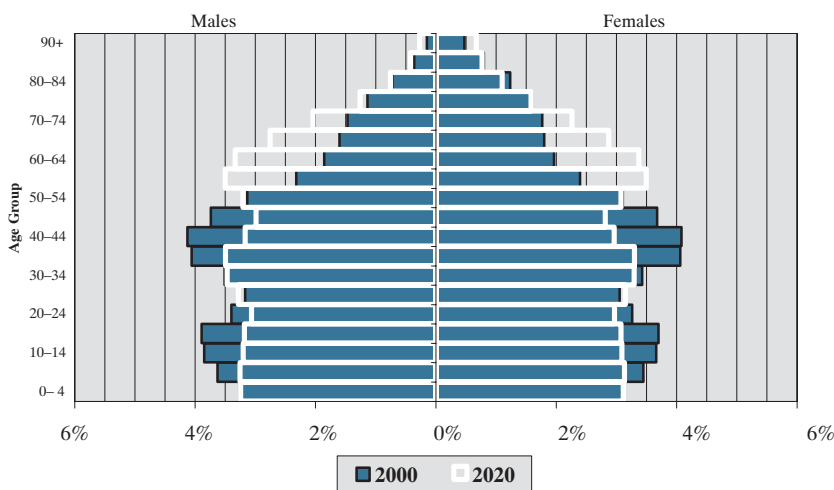
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Census of Population, 1940 to 2000

Because of overall growth in the population, the number of people in each age group mostly increases from one census to another. Yet, because of irregularities in the age composition of the population – irregularities resulting from past swings in birth rates – some age groups increase much faster than others, and some age groups occasionally witness decline between any two censuses, despite overall population growth. The changing age and sex composition of Wisconsin’s population can be portrayed through the use of population pyramids. The overall shape of the pyramid and the length of the bars for each age group depict the age-sex distribution and changes in age-sex structure over time.

Figure 18 is one example of a population pyramid. Each horizontal bar shows the share of the population belonging to a particular age-sex group. For example, in the 2000 Census, young females ages 5 to 9 constituted approximately 3.4% of the state's population. The white outline shows the anticipated population pyramid (based on formal population forecasts) for Wisconsin's population in the year 2020. Twenty years from the most recent census, the relative share of the population between the ages of 5 and 24 and between 35 and 49 will decline. On the other hand, the share of the population in ages above age 55 will increase substantially as the baby boom generation moves into their retirement years. This “graying of the population” is a trend that speaks clearly regarding some of the challenges the state will face in coming years in the areas of social, health and housing policy.

Figure 18

### Population by Age and Sex, Wisconsin: 2000 & 2020 (Projected)



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Census of Population, 2000; Wisconsin Department of Administration, Population Projections 2002

## Race and Ethnic Diversity

Since 1790, every population census in the United States has collected information on the racial and ethnic makeup of the population. Responding in part to changes in patterns of immigration (movement from abroad) and, in part, to evolving social or cultural views on race and ethnicity, the number of specific race and ethnic groups identified in the census has changed and generally increased over time. Presently there are clear rules at the federal level – defined by a statistical policy unit in, of all places, the Executive Office of Management and Budget (OMB) – which stipulate how race and ethnicity data are statistically (note, *not* culturally or anthropologically) defined. These regulations state how statistical data on race and ethnicity are to be gathered and tabulated by federal agencies. The decennial census must adhere to these rules. It is important to understand that, as